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## The Machine's Effect on the Psyche of the American Woman: A Dramaturgical Analysis of *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell

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**THE MACHINE'S EFFECT ON THE PSYCHE OF THE AMERICAN WOMAN:  
A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF MACHINAL BY SOPHIE TREADWELL**

**Kori Jackson**



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# Thesis Cover Page

*The Machine's Effect on the Psyche of the American Woman:  
A Dramaturgical Analysis of Machinal by Sophie Treadwell*

by  
Kori Jackson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
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*The Machine's Effect on the Psyche of the American Woman:  
A Dramaturgical Analysis of Machinal by Sophie Treadwell*

Structural Analysis

I. Given Circumstances

A. Environmental facts

1. Geographical location

- a. Treadwell leaves the exact location up to the director.
  - i. In Episode 8, the Bailiff calls out the trial. "State of \_\_\_\_\_ versus Helen Jones".
  - ii. Treadwell has left the location up to the director. Perhaps this is so it will affect the audience more personally if the state is their own.
  - iii. It also reaffirms the universal, expressionist quality of the play.
- b. However, the play is based on the life, trial, and execution of Ruth Snyder who was the first woman ever given the death sentence in the U.S.
  - i. If the director chooses to go for a more historically accurate representation of the play, then the state would be New York.
- c. In addition, the circumstances of the script add to the atmosphere of the location and this must be taken into account.
  - i. There are many references to city life in the script.
    - a) "The subway?" (6)
    - b) "All those bodies pressing." (6)
    - c) "Take a taxi." (6)
    - d) The apartment complex that Young Woman lives in with her mother (Episode 2) has very thin walls and has a trash chute. This is indicative of a city apartment.
    - e) The speakeasy in Episode 5 is very indicative of city life during this time.
    - f) At the beginning of Episode 6, Treadwell adds outside atmospheric elements in the stage direction that again lead us toward city life. She adds that there are sounds of passing feet, which during the night anywhere but the city would be an odd occurrence. She also has a street lamp shining in the window—another element of a city.
  - ii. Based on the time period that the play is set in, the obvious choice is for the city to be New York—not only because of the historical events the play is attached to, but the simple reality of what cities were like back then.
    - a) During the time period, New York and Chicago were the only cities that had a subway system that was fully running.

- b) New York is known for its overcrowding.
    - c) Speakeasies thrived in New York.
  - 2. Date: year, season, time of day
    - a. The play is set traditionally in the late 1920s which is when the actual Ruth Snyder case took place as well.
    - b. The time of day changes with each episode.
      - i. Episode 1: morning, around 9 or 10 AM
        - a) It is near the beginning of the work day.
        - b) Young Woman is late, which makes it slightly after 9 or 10 AM.
      - ii. Episode 2: evening; dinner time
        - a) Young Woman and her mother are eating dinner.
      - iii. Episode 3: late evening; around 8 or 9 PM
        - a) It is after the wedding but not too late to take a walk. Young Woman says "Can we go out for a while?"
      - iv. Episode 4: day; possibly morning
        - a) Young Woman wants the window shut for the noise of construction outside her window. Because this is the first time she mentions it, it seems that it is early enough in the morning that she has not had to deal with it until now.
      - v. Episode 5: evening
        - a) The scene takes place in a bar where there are numerous couples. This would usually occur in the evening.
      - vi. Episode 6: middle of the night
        - a) "It's been dark for hours—didn't you know that?" (49)
      - vii. Episode 7: late evening; just before 11 PM
        - a) "It's only ten-forty-six—wait!" (57)
      - viii. Episode 8: morning
        - a) "The defense sprang up a surprise at the court this morning . . ." (61)
      - ix. Episode 9: not noted specifically but it is later in the day at least
    - c. There are very few references to seasons, but choices can be made to help influence the mood of the play.
      - i. "It's getting cold" (15) suggests that it is fall in Episode 2
      - ii. When Young Woman wants to go for a walk on the boardwalk in Episode 3, it suggests spring or summer.
      - iii. The window is open in Episode 4 suggesting spring or summer.
      - iv. In Episode 8, it is stated that her husband was killed June 3<sup>rd</sup>, which means that the trial logically took place in early fall (64).
  - 3. Economic environment
    - a. Young Woman's economic environment is very low status in the beginning. We see this in her interactions with her Mother.

- i. Her Mother's biggest news for the day is how much money she saved on potatoes.
  - ii. Her Mother decides that Young Woman should marry Mr. J because he can take care of them financially. She does not care whether her daughter loves him or not.
  - iii. Her mother answers her own question by saying, "He's a decent man, isn't he? . . . He's a Vice President—of course he's decent." (18)
- 4. Political environment
  - a. The political environment is one in which law is highly valued.
  - b. During the 1920s, it was somewhat unheard of for a woman to be charged with this kind of murder and even more shocking for a woman to be susceptible to the death penalty.
  - c. This created an environment in which the judicial system was pressured to find justice, while still upholding their image in the eyes of the public.
  - d. This can really be seen in Episode 8 during the trial as Young Woman becomes the puppet of the judicial system. They will do anything they need to do to get a conviction.
    - i. The prosecution plays games with Young Woman and leads her with questions and statements that discredit her. For example, when she is trying to explain herself, the Lawyer for Prosecution jumps in "perhaps—from the window". Regardless of whether this was true or not, his suggestions discredit anything she says.
  - e. The media also adds to the political environment by turning the story against Young Woman. They fiercely persecute her during the trial scene.
    - a. "First Reporter: The defense sprang a surprise at the opening of the opening of the court this morning by putting the accused woman on the stand. The prosecution was swept off its feet by this daring defense strategy and—" (61)
    - b. "Second Reporter: Trembling and scarcely able to stand, Helen Jones, accused murderess, had to be almost carried to the witness stand this morning when her lawyer—" (61)
    - c. Their words add to the antagonization of her character and form the public opinion of her in the trial.
- 5. Social environment
  - a. The society has many expectations of what a woman, especially a married woman, should and should not do.
    - i. A woman is supposed to be a good mother and a good wife by taking care of the house, keeping things orderly, teaching and disciplining the children, and having sex with her husband.
      - a) "A mother's a very precious thing—a good mother." (56). The addition of Mr. J's line, "a good mother",

implies that he does not think that Young Woman is a good mother.

- ii. A woman is not supposed to go out at night, even think of other men, or have a job much less a life of her own.

- a) This can be seen in Episode 5: Prohibited by the manner in which people tip-toe around the idea of having an affair.
- b) Telephone Girl tries to hide what she and 2<sup>nd</sup> Man are really up to from Young Woman.

- b. Young Woman does not meet these requirements and therefore is unable to make herself fit into this constrained society. She feels trapped.

#### 6. Religious environment

- a. The religious environment is not as emphasized as the social environment in the script; however it has a major influence on the social opinion.
- b. Catholicism seems to be the intended religion as seen when the Priest comes in during the final episode.
- c. Catholicism as well as other Christian faiths hold the same values to be true as seen in the society here.
  - i. Family is valued over all other ambitions.
  - ii. Murder and adultery are the worst sins one can commit.
- d. The values of the predominant religion always affect the society around it even when the members of society do not necessarily attend church services.

#### B. Previous action

- 1. The following are important events to know that have happened in the life of Young Woman before the play begins.
  - a. Her father leaves or dies.
  - b. She takes the job at George H. Jones Company to help support herself and her Mother.
  - c. She is late for work often.
  - d. Young Woman often feels that she is suffocating in her society. She feels she does not fit in.
  - e. Mr. J has taken an interest in her.
  - f. She takes special care of her hands by wearing gloves to bed and while doing hard work in an effort to keep them soft and pretty.

## II. Dialogue

### A. Choice of phrases and sentence structure

- 1. Treadwell organizes the language in a way that reflects the mechanical nature of society.
- 2. This motif is established in the opening episode. The rapid-fire lines and the repetition of sentences give the play a mechanical sound. This establishes an atmosphere that is kept throughout the piece.

Telephone Girl: The early worm gets caught.

Adding Clerk: He's caught.



Telephone Girl: Hooked.  
 Adding Clerk: In the Pan.  
 Filing Clerk: Hot dog.  
 (Treadwell 5)

3. The mechanical atmosphere and the chaos of its effect on Young Woman are shown in the monologues of the young woman. Her speech is staccato with short phrases. This rhythm continues the mechanical musicality of the play while adding a new dimension. Young Woman's speeches carry a rhythm that is different from the machine. Her speeches are more free-flowing rather than the jerky quality that the machine has. So while it is still mechanical in nature, it is the part of the machine that does not quite fit.

Let me rest – now I can rest – the weight is gone – inside the  
 weight is gone – it's only outside – outside – all around – weight –  
 I'm under it . . . (Treadwell 31)

- B. Choice of peculiar characteristics (ex. dialect, poetic language, etc.)
  1. The most peculiar characteristic is the sentence structure changes.
  2. Young Woman's speeches are very stylized. They are erased, stream of conscious speeches filled with one-word sentences coupled with repetition of words and sounds.
  3. These speeches show the breakdown that is happening for her.
 

Puppies don't go to heaven – heaven – golden stairs – long stairs –  
 long – too long – long golden stairs – climb – those golden stairs –  
 stairs – stairs – climb . . . (Treadwell 30)

C. The sound of the dialogue

1. The sound of the dialogue is the sound of a machine. The quick pace of delivery coupled with repetition of sounds creates the atmosphere of a mechanical world. This sound changes during Episodes 5 and 6 when the character of First Man is introduced. Those episodes give a glimpse into another world that is not controlled by the machine.
2. The sound of the machine is also emphasized especially heavily in Episode 1 by the sounds of actual machines (typewriter, adding machine, telephone board, etc.).

Adding Clerk: 2409, 28, 76, 123, 36842, 1, ¼, 37, 804, 23 ½, 982.  
 Filing Clerk: Accounts—A. Bonds—B. Contracts—C. Data—D.  
 Earnings—E.

Stenographer: Dear sir – in re – your letter – recent date – will  
 state

3. When the sound is not mechanical, as brought in by the song in Episode Six: Intimate, it is there to show glimpses of a different way of life. It gives hope for the idea of freedom that Young Woman is so desperately trying to find in her surrounding world.

Man: Canta non llores – sing don't cry

Young Woman: lalalalala – Little Heaven

D. Structure of lines and speeches

1. Treadwell keeps the main conversations somewhat realistic when compared to conversational speech, while juxtaposing them with the Young Woman's stylized speeches.
  2. This juxtaposition forces the audience to see Young Woman in a much different light than the rest of the characters.
- E. How can I describe the language in a way that communicates its style and syntax, as well as its mood, rhythm and texture?
1. The language Treadwell uses creates an autonomous machine whose sounds and motions accelerate until a part of the machine breaks off completely, i.e. Young Woman.

### III. Dramatic Action

#### A. Detailed breakdown of the action.

1. The action of the play is broken down into episodes of action that culminate in a conclusive story about Young Woman's fight against society.
2. The episodes are as follows:
  - a. Episode 1: To Business
    - i. Young Woman arrives late to work.
    - ii. She is very upset about being late and feels frazzled by the hustle and bustle of the day.
    - iii. Mr. J proposes to her.
    - iv. The proposal makes her forget everything at work.
  - b. Episode 2: At Home
    - i. Young Woman eats dinner with her Mother and tells her about the proposal.
    - ii. Mother is at first unsure about the marriage but jumps on board when she finds out about the money that Mr. J has.
    - iii. Young Woman is at first very adamant about not marrying him. She wants to marry for love not for money, but eventually she gives way to the idea.
  - c. Episode 3: Honeymoon
    - i. The night of their wedding, Mr. J takes Young Woman to a hotel.
    - ii. Mr. J tries to get Young Woman in the mood by trying to tell dirty jokes and asking provocative questions of Young Woman.
    - iii. When he tries to have sex with her, she begins to cry.
    - iv. Mr. J is at a loss of how to comfort her as Young Woman cries for her mother.
  - d. Episode 4: Maternal
    - i. Young Woman is in the hospital after having a baby.
    - ii. The thought of the baby makes her nauseas.
    - iii. Mr. J comes to visit and brings flowers. Young Woman begins to gag as Mr. J is trying to give her a pep talk.
    - iv. The doctors force her to eat solids and orders that the baby is brought in to nurse.

- e. Episode 5: Prohibited
    - i. Young Woman goes out to a bar with Telephone Girl.
    - ii. Telephone Girl leaves Young Woman at the bar to go have sex with her lover.
    - iii. Young Woman meets a Man and goes back to his apartment with him after he tells her about how he killed a man to escape and find freedom.
  - f. Episode 6: Intimate
    - i. Young Woman is able to open-up to this Man and has sex with him.
    - ii. It is the best night of her life.
    - iii. He goes into more detail about how he won his freedom.
    - iv. Young Woman is fascinated by a lily the Man has on his window sill. She asks to take it with her when she leaves.
  - g. Episode 7: Domestic
    - i. Mr. J and Young Woman go through the motions of married life.
    - ii. They both sit reading a newspaper. They alternate reading out the headlines.
    - iii. Mr. J receives many phone calls congratulating him on winning property. Young Woman goes through the routine of asking her husband questions about the sale.
    - iv. Young Woman tries to explain how she is feeling to Mr. J but he blocks her out.
  - h. Episode 8: The Law
    - i. Young Woman is on trial for killing her husband, Mr. J.
    - ii. Testimony is brought in.
    - iii. No one is on her side.
    - iv. Everyone twists her words and uses them against her. This includes the prosecution, defense, and media.
    - v. She is convicted and sentenced to the electric chair.
  - i. Episode 9: A Machine
    - i. This is the day of Young Woman's execution.
    - ii. Her Mother and a Priest are brought in to try to console her.
    - iii. Young Woman desperately tries to understand what got her here.
    - iv. Young Woman asks the priest about her salvation.
    - v. At first she does not want to see her mother but then does not want her to leave. She asks her mother to take care of her daughter and make sure that she has a better outcome.
    - vi. She is stripped and taken to the electric chair.
- B. What is the spine (main action) of the play?
- 1. The main action is Young Woman struggling against a cold, mechanical society she does not fit into.
- C. Which actions should be given the most emphasis?

1. The actions that should be given the most emphasis are those that add to the pressure and constriction that Young Woman feels in the society.
    - a. This includes how she is treated and thought of in the workplace. There is a stark contrast between how she feels in the workplace compared to the other women there. The other women seem to have no problem fitting in with the job. They criticize her in the same way that the men do.
    - b. Also, the way the outside world views her should be emphasized. For example, in the hospital scene, Episode 4, it is important that we see how disgusted the doctor is with having to deal with such a woman. Also in the trial scene, Episode 8, it is important that the opinions of the press and the authorities should be emphasized.
    - c. These points further alienate Young Woman from society.
  2. The expectations of the society should also be emphasized. This will help the audience understand why the society rejects her in such a harsh way.
    - a. There are instances of this that occur in every episode. Some of the strongest are the following:
      - i. Financial needs are more important to Young Woman's mother than her own daughter's happiness.
      - ii. The relationship between Mr. J and Young Woman is all about his sexual fulfillment and pride.
      - iii. The nurse emphasizes how wonderful it is to be a mother in the hospital scene.
  3. The opposite should also be emphasized.
    - a. It is important for the audience to see who Young Woman really is in the lover scene (Episode 6).
    - b. This should connect the audience to the character of Young Woman and allow them to feel empathetic toward her throughout the rest of the play.
- D. How do I describe the play's action even if it is not *traditionally conceived* action?
1. This play has an episodic structure. It is a series of snapshots of Young Woman's life that lead to her tragic outcome.
  2. The choice of episodic allows the playwright to tell a very long and intense story that takes place over a long period of time while highlighting the most significant moments.
  3. The selectivity of the episodes allows the playwright to build momentum while telling the story.
  4. The audience receives just the information that they need to understand the story and have a point-of-view about it.

#### IV. Characters

##### A. Character description

1. Young Woman: meek, fragile, ordinary
2. George H. Jones: over-the-top, cocky, forceful
3. First Man (Lover): smooth, exotic, adventurous
4. Mother: traditional, regimented, fixed



5. Telephone Girl: flirtatious, provocative, talkative
6. The Machine (the other characters): controlling, relentless, cold
- B. Character objective
  1. Young Woman: to free herself
  2. George H. Jones: to conquer
  3. First Man (Lover): to give her hope
  4. Mother: to be set for life
  5. Telephone Girl: to make the most of her life
  6. The Machine (the other characters): to control
- C. Whose play is it?
 

Young Woman is the focus of the story. It is the effect of the Machine in every area of her life that is the essential story.

## V. Idea

- A. Meaning of the title
  1. "Machinal" means of or pertaining to machines.
  2. The title immediately forms the image of mechanics in the mind of the audience.
  3. This image is then reemphasized and elaborated on by the fruition of the play when the machine finally breaks Young Woman down.
  4. Because they are looking for it, it is easier for an audience to see the mechanical holdings that the society has over Young Woman.
- B. Philosophical statements in the play
  1. "married – all girls – most girls – married – babies"—Young Woman (Treadwell 11)
  2. "I'll tell you what you can count on! You can count that you've got to eat and sleep and get up and put clothes on your back and take 'em off again – that you got to get old – and that you got to die. That's what you can count on! All the rest is in your head!"—Mother (Treadwell 17)
  3. "Men want boys – women ought to want girls. Maybe you didn't want either, eh? You'll feel different when it begins to nurse. You'll just love it then!"—Nurse (Treadwell 27)
  4. "Some men don't seem to like a woman after she's married."—Young Woman (Treadwell 38)
  5. "A mother's a very precious thing – And a child's a very precious thing. Precious jewels."—Husband (Treadwell 56)
  6. "You'll submit, my lady. Right to the end, you'll submit!"—Barber (Treadwell 79)
- C. Implications of the action
  1. Treadwell's play makes audiences think about what kind of a mechanical hold their society has on them.
  2. "How am I looking for freedom but being stifled by the society around me?" one might ask.
  3. It also makes an audience question their feelings about death row execution. Through Treadwell's play, the audience may begin to take the side of Young Woman, who is also the killer. That is a much different

perspective than we are used to taking. This allows us to walk in the shoes of the accused rather than the victim—a very different pair of shoes.

- D. What are the dominant ideas in the play?
  1. The pressure and anxiety an individual feels when alienated by society and the role(s) one is expected to play.
  2. The definition of what a woman “should” be.
  3. Can murder be justified?
  4. Is death row the proper way to handle murder convictions?
  5. How heavy of an influence do the media have on the view of society towards a certain person?
- E. Should the production emphasize text or subtext, and in what balance?
  1. The play itself holds a lot of subtext and therefore it is essential that it be emphasized.
  2. The repetition of lines forces them to go somewhere emotionally. If they do not hold subtext, they are rather worthless lines.
    - a. In Young Woman’s first speech in Episode 1, it is important that we know the importance she places on hands. Hands tell a lot about a person for her and she derives a lot of her feelings about people based on the way their hands look.
    - b. “let me look at your pretty little hands – George H. Jones – Fat hands – flabby hands – don’t touch me – please – fat hands are never weary” (11).
    - c. There should be a difference of opinion stated through the subtext of the line about how Young Woman feels about her hands compared to Mr. J’s.
  3. The subtext must also be emphasized to show the difference in perspectives of Young Woman versus society.
    - a. This is first really emphasized in Young Woman’s speech to her mother in Episode 2.
    - b. “Your skin oughtn’t to curl – ought it – when he just comes near you – ought it? . . . Do you get used to, it – so after a while it doesn’t matter? Or don’t you? . . . And I suppose I got to marry somebody – all girls do – ” (18)
    - c. Here Young Woman is sincerely questioning the rules that society has in place.

### Dramaturgical Research

#### I. Playwright

##### A. Biographical data

Sophie Treadwell was a very personally motivated writer and journalist. There are many experiences from her background that influenced the material she chose and the way she wrote about a subject. This included her upbringing, her career path, and her own personal journey.

Sophie Treadwell grew up in Stockton, California. Treadwell’s childhood was plagued by the stress in her family. Her father, Alfred, was a “stern

disciplinarian, a trait that characterized his career as a lawyer, justice of the peace, city prosecutor and judge” (Dickey). From an early point in her life, Sophie Treadwell saw men as overbearing, strong forces in the home. When Treadwell’s parents separated, this idea carried out further. Even though they were separated, Alfred continued to keep a strong hold on their family. Nettie, Treadwell’s mother, was never able to follow through on her promise to divorce Alfred. Throughout the separation, Treadwell observed the emotional hardship that her mother went through. This greatly impacted her view of women in the home and of the relationship between men and women. Her views can be seen in her other writings and in *Machinal*.

Throughout her education, Treadwell struggled to find the one subject that she excelled in. She received a Bachelor of Letters from University of California-Berkley in French, but never felt confident in her abilities. She explored many extracurricular activities. It was during her time at Berkley that she began to explore journalism and the theatre. Treadwell pushed herself during her collegiate years to pay for school while exploring many areas in education. “She studied shorthand and typing at a commercial high school in preparation for an office job, worked in the circulation department of the *San Francisco Call*, and taught foreign students at a local night school” all while taking a full-load of classes and participating in the college drama club (Dickey). These experiences led her to begin to pursue journalism and theatrical writing more.

When she moved to San Francisco in 1908 to take care of her mother, Treadwell’s journalism career took off. She landed a spot with the *San Francisco Bulletin* as a feature writer and theatre critic. Her work on the *Bulletin* laid the foundation for her illustrious career. She did two very successful serial pieces for them. The first was a reaction to prostitution in the city. Treadwell dressed up as a homeless prostitute and sought after what charity she could. She recounted her experience in an 18-part series called “An Outcast at the Christian Door.” According to Jerry Dickey in the *Illustrated Biography of Sophie Treadwell*, “The assignment not only gave Treadwell an outlet for her acting talents, but also allowed her to explore a subject that would form the basis for much of her early drama: the plight of a young woman alone in the modern city.” The second serial was written about her adult and childhood experiences with men. It was entitled, “How I Got My Husband and How I Lost Him”. With these two stories, Treadwell made her mark on the world of journalism.

During World War I, the editor of the *Bulletin* sent Treadwell abroad to cover the woman’s perspective on the war. This made Treadwell one of the first female foreign correspondents recognized by the State Department. This was a huge stepping stone in Treadwell’s career. Upon her return from Europe, Treadwell took jobs at the *New York American* and *New York Tribune* newspapers. At the *New York Tribune*, Treadwell established her notoriety as a journalist on a national level. Her work on Mexican-American relations served her greatly. “Treadwell was the only American journalist granted access to Pancho Villa at his hideaway in Canutillo, Mexico, and the two-day interview later served as the basis for Treadwell’s first Broadway play, *Gringo* (1922) and a novel, *Lusita* (1931) . . .” (Dickey).

As her journalism career grew, Treadwell was empowered to take action in other areas of her life. Her marriage to William O. McGeehan was very unconventional for the time period. A few years into their marriage, McGeehan got a job in New York and instead of following her husband immediately, she stayed to finish her job in San Francisco. "For a time in New York, Mac and Treadwell maintained separate residences, an idea promoted for women by Ruth Hale, president of the Lucy Stone League, of which Treadwell was an active member" (Dickey). Treadwell's involvement with the Lucy Stone League was not just one of admiration. "She completed a 150-mile march with the feminist Lucy Stone League to deliver a petition on women's suffrage to the New York legislature" (Dickey). This feminist outlook is present in all of Treadwell's writings.

Treadwell's plays often deal with the subjects that feminism was battling at the time. Her plays cover issues like birth-control, women in the workforce, and political and sexual independence. "Plays such as *Constance Darrow*, *O Nightingale*, and *Machinal* center on the experiences of a somewhat overly trusting woman embarking on a new career or just entering the still male-dominated workplace" (Ozieblo 102). These plays usually involve a personal revelation that changes the women's perception of the world around them.

Treadwell's experiences in life taught her to question the conventional relationships around her. She crossed boundaries and pushed the limits in life and in her writing. Treadwell's strong point of view led her to the effectiveness of her literature.

## B. Personal Influences

To fully understand Treadwell's plays, one must look into her background and her journey as a feminist. Throughout her life, the role of women in society has been at the forefront of Sophie Treadwell's mind. She learned from her mother that a woman was powerless in a relationship with a man. But as Treadwell went away to college and began to take care of herself, she was able to empower herself and launch her own career.

Her relationship with her husband is also very important. Their relationship seems to be built upon mutual trust and respect. This can be seen in how they each kept their own careers alive but still enjoyed each other's company. It is noted that they took many road trips together throughout their marriage. In fact, they were on vacation together on the night McGeehan died (Dickey).

These relationships can be seen in the play, *Machinal*, as Treadwell shows both an unhealthy and an idyllic relationship. Young Woman is in a very overbearing relationship with her husband but experiences passionate love with the man she meets at the bar. The comparison between these two relationships would not be as strong if it were not for Treadwell's past.

## II. Production and Style

### A. Reviews from productions

#### 1. Plymouth Theatre, 1928

- a. The first production of *Machinal* owes most of its success to being the first work to cover the trial. And Treadwell's



depiction of the story was unique and invigorating. Treadwell chose Arthur Hopkins as director because of his unique theory on theatre. “Briefly summarized [his] theory espouses an attempt to create a stage illusion of such hypnotic power that it will stimulate a response directly in an audience’s unconscious” (Ozieblo 150). Treadwell worked closely with Hopkins to create an environment that would connect the audience with the world of the play on a deeper level. They utilized a simplistic set to boil the environment down to its essence. “Hopkins sought to render the conscious mind inoperative by eliminating from the stage all non-essential features, such as unnecessary scenery, props, or acting tricks that might arouse the curiosity or focus of the conscious mind” (Ozieblo 151). The production was very effective and received well by its audiences. The critics focused not on the feminist aspects of it but more about how the story connected to the actual trial. The news was still fresh and therefore affected the audience on a more personal level.

2. Kamerny Theatre, Moscow, 1933
  - a. This production was especially interesting because it connected this story to a place outside of the Western world. Tairov, the director, used this play to make a comment on what he saw in the Western culture. “Tairov perceived an inherent contradiction in Western culture: while it professed to champion the individual, its capitalist thrust served to depersonalize and standardize human life” (Ozieblo 155). In order to highlight this aspect, Tairov focused on the isolation of the character of Young Woman from the rest of the world. “Throughout the play, Tairov established a rhythm for Alice Koonen as the Young Woman that ran in counterpoint to that of the other characters” (Ozieblo 158). Treadwell, in reflection upon this new production, commented that she really appreciated Tairov’s attention to the mechanical aspects of the play.
3. New York Shakespeare Festival, 1990
  - a. After many years of Treadwell’s work not being produced, this production refocused the theatre community’s eyes on Treadwell. There had been television broadcasts of *Machinal* during the 50s and 60s, but this theatrical production really put her back on the map. The really unique aspect of this production was its transformational staging. “One critic noted, ‘The cast of 15 seems twice that size – some actors play three or four roles’” (qtd. by Ozieblo 159). Greif used the doubling of parts to make connections and further draw the audience in. As Tairov did, Greif focused on the mechanical nature of the society around Young Woman. He set the entire action in a

skeletal factory that was reconfigured to represent the different settings. The production was praised for its production values as well as the reawakening of Treadwell's work. The production was also praised for the work of Jodie Markell as Young Woman. "Frank Rich noted that 'her anguished cries for peace and freedom are so affecting that they never fail to overwhelm the churning mechanical sounds of the hellish city engulfing her'" (qtd. by Ozicblo 160). The environment that Greif created set the tone for many of the productions that would follow.

4. Royal National Theatre, 1993
  - a. This production of *Machinal* added very special elements to again add to the mechanical atmosphere that Treadwell had wanted. This production, directed by Stephen Daldry, was a conceptual feast. The design team created a monumental production that included very particular choices to enhance the play. The production featured a "live, four-piece band that utilized violin, clarinet and electric bass, along with a variety of percussive objects such as filing cabinets and metallic pieces" (Ozicblo 162). This created a full underscoring of the play that added to the overall concept of the machine. The stage was also used to enhance the scenic design. The standard masking was all stripped bare and the stage crew wore costumes to become a part of the machine. These unique additions to the theatrical concept made the writing of Treadwell really come alive.
5. The Hypocrites Theatre, Chicago, 2003
  - a. This more recent production of *Machinal* seemed to take elements from the previous productions. In addition to the expressionist style, the director added an element of realism that connected the newer audiences to the script. According to the *Chicago Sun Times*, this production "blends high stylization with nerve-deep realism". This production was especially praised for Michelle Moe's work as Young Woman. According to *Gay Chicago Magazine*, "Moe peels back the flesh as she exposes Helen's every prick of fear, twinge of hate, chill of despair. It is a painful, exhilarating, anguishing, and mesmerizing work of passion at the core of a fiercely produced and impressively gritty triumph." This production reemphasized the power of Treadwell's work to reach across generations.

#### B. Playwright's Style

Sophie Treadwell's style is often associated with the male contemporaries of her time: Eugene O'Neill and Elmer Rice. During the 1920s, these writers were being influenced by German Expressionistic theatre in a way that the American stage had not yet witnessed. Expressionistic drama is characterized by

heightened text that is often expansive, clipped, or musical. This type of dialogue connected the audience with a rhythm particular to the play. Expressionist drama is also characterized by the environment often being boiled down to its essence. This often involved bare-boned sets and dynamic levels. Sophie Treadwell's style is marked with these ideas.

Sophie Treadwell focuses on the inner-workings of the mind of the protagonist. She reveals this to the audience through lengthy speeches that express what they are feeling. These speeches are often illogical stream-of-consciousness writings that represent an emotion rather than thought. This is very characteristic of Expressionist theatre. These often irrational speeches are a device Treadwell uses to "encourage theatre spectators to fill in the gaps so that, as Treadwell stated, 'the audience discovers – writes the play'" (Ozieblo 106). Treadwell's use of language is unique and heightens the words to a greater level than one might find otherwise.

In opposition to the other expressionistic writers of her time, Treadwell treated the plot differently. While episodic structure is characteristic of expressionist drama, Treadwell handles it in a distinctive way. Unlike her male counterparts' plays during the 1920s, Treadwell "avoids dramatizing climactic scenes, choosing instead to focus on the conditions that lead up to and immediately follow such moments of conflict" (Ozieblo 148). In *Machinal*, for example, Treadwell does not portray the scene in which Young Woman kills her husband but rather the night leading up to that event and then the trial afterward. Her unique treatment of the plot line makes her stand out from other expressionistic writers.

Treadwell made her own path in life and in her writing. She saw the misconceptions of the society around her and focused on challenging those things through her writing. Her determination paid off as she is now revered as one of the great American female playwrights. Her unique treatment of the script from the detailed language and provocative plotlines make Treadwell one of the most distinctive writers of the twentieth century.

### III. The World of the Play

#### A. Historical

The story of *Machinal* is based on the real life trial of Ruth Snyder. The play cannot be presented properly without knowledge of this historical event. It is one of the most infamous murder trials in history. According to Ozieblo and Dickey in their biography of Sophie Treadwell, "The New York newspapers assigned 180 reporters to cover the story, which fed the public's appetite for details about this seemingly normal housewife turned cold-blooded murderer" (146). Ruth was married to Albert Snyder and for a while was the typical New York housewife. But in 1925, Ruth began to have an affair with a corset salesman named Judd Gray. In an effort to be with Judd for the rest of her life, Ruth began planning Albert's murder. Her first step was to open a life insurance policy. This named her as the beneficiary to Albert's estate with a bonus if his death was through a violent act. According to Mark Gado, author of *Death Row Women: Murder, Justice, and the New York Press*, "For over a year, Ruth tried to kill Albert and failed each time" (14). On March 20, 1927, Ruth and Judd

succeeded in killing Albert. They staged his death to be a robbery but the investigation soon proved otherwise.

During a search of the house, investigators began to find the 'stolen' objects hidden throughout the house. Judd Gray's alibi turned out to be false and the investigators found Ruth's portrayal of the grieving wife more than unconvincing. Ruth and Judd were both charged separately for the murder of Albert Snyder.

The trial was a huge sensation. If convicted, Ruth would face the death penalty. The trial became the focus of all the news. "In the streets near the courthouse, dozens of vendors sold souvenirs and memorabilia, while radio hosts described in breathless tones the carnival-like atmosphere; it seemed as if the very fate of American womanhood depended on the outcome of the trial" (Gado 8).

The trial was a battle between Ruth and Judd. They each blamed the other for the murder. In the end, both were convicted of the crime. They were sentenced to death row at Sing Sing Prison. Ruth was the first woman to ever receive the death penalty; she was executed by electrocution just like Young Woman in *Machinal*.

The press and the rest of society begged for any breaking news on this case. It was one of the most alarming trials in history. The phenomenon surrounding the trial and execution of Ruth Snyder had a lot to do with the perspective of society at that time. To fully understand the reasoning behind the hype, one must understand both the economic and social aspects of the time period.

#### B. Economic

The Roaring Twenties was a time of prosperity and urbanization in America. The U.S. successfully moved from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy. Soldiers returning from the war created an overwhelming adjustment in the workforce. With more workers, factories were able to produce more. This meant that items that had been considered a luxury before the war were now available to the middle-class. Cars, radios, and other technologies connected people in a way never before possible.

The population of cities grew, as well, as more and more people pursued industrial as opposed to agricultural work. With more people in the cities and more money to spend, social aspects of life became an increasing focus. This led to the growth of speakeasies. Speakeasies were underground bars that still sold alcohol even though it had been banned by the Eighteenth Amendment and the Prohibition Act. Speakeasies were more than just bars; however, they often sold food and offered a variety of entertainment shows. These bars were the height of social rebellion and became symbols of the ever-growing freedoms embraced by the younger generation.

These newfound freedoms economically, created new social issues as women began to become more independently affluent and more outgoing socially. The workplace and bars were no longer only men's arenas. As women began to discover new freedoms, the public began to question the definition of a woman's role in society.

#### C. Social



Much of the hype of the trial was based on these social aspects regarding the role of women. This was the first time that the standard definition of a woman was really challenged. In the 1920s, women were changing. Women began to be looser with hemlines rising and styles becoming more masculine. The idea of women's suffrage added to the excitement for women to find their own freedoms.

The definition of a woman was ever-changing during the 1920s. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the last state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, thus granting women the right to vote. This newly found political equality, spurred women to embrace freedom in other areas of their lives. Women began to embrace their sexuality, especially the younger generation. These women, known as flappers, did away with the corsets and Victorian collars donning instead knee-length dresses exposing their bodies. Women began to change their ways of thinking. Before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women were only to be caretakers of their families but as this mentality changed, women began to seek personal fulfillment as well as family responsibility. At the same time that this new mentality was emerging, however, the idea of the feminine mystique was still prominent.

According to this idea, all women should marry and 'good' women stayed at home to take care of their children and home. These two attitudes clashed throughout the 1920s and were especially highlighted in the Ruth Snyder case. "Conflict over modernity came into sharp focus in the Snyder case, particularly as Ruth came to represent for many, the dire outcome of modernization . . . [People] saw Ruth as symptomatic of a modern society out of control" (Gado 11). The Ruth Snyder case became the forum for debate about the eventual outcome of the changing definition of the American woman.

#### IV. Interpretation

The most important aspect of the interpretation of *Machinal* is how the machine is represented. In Columbus State University's production, our goal was to make it feel like the Young Woman was a cog within a machine that just did not fit. The way we achieved this was through the incorporation of the machine into the set, the sound, and the transitions.

The set design, by Kimberly Manuel, incorporated literal mechanics into the set. The set was created to revolve and transform into the different scenes. Each piece transitioned into another form. The back of one fixture was a completely new setting. The design also included cogs and wheels that were shown. The set was made out of literal machine parts, many of which worked to help with the transitions. The items were designed to reveal the mechanics to the audience. The colors were very cool grays, blacks, and browns that mimicked the colors of steel machinery. The set design transported the audience into the world of the play as they saw how society mechanically controls the people both literally and figuratively.

The lighting design, by Krystal Kennel, highlighted the areas of focus for each episode and also helped to create mood throughout the production. The use of colors or stark white light helped to show different aspects of the world of the play from lurking danger to the seductiveness at the bar to the cold, harsh nature

of the oppressive machine. The lights highlighted the shifts in the world of the play and helped to take the audience on their journey through the play.

Each episode was denoted by a change in the structure of the set and which areas of the stage were used. Episode 1: To Business opened with the scene far downstage with a segmented set (see Figure A). The stations of each worker in the office were denoted by their different stage areas. The separation of each area added to the cold nature of the workplace as well as the distance between them socially. The closeness of the set to the audience, created a force that thrust the audience into the play. The opening picture immediately gave the audience an impression of the world of the play that the rest of the production would build upon.



Fig. A

Episode 2: At Home brought a more isolated look into the world of the play (see Figure B). The scene was secluded to the downstage right side of the stage. The cramped acting area gave the sense of the weight of society on Young Woman. The transformation of the set as the telephone desk became the sink in the kitchen of the apartment began the motif of the machine being in every aspect of the characters' lives.



Fig. B

The design for Episode 3: Honeymoon brought in a new use of color that added a sense of danger to the piece. The full stage was used to create the sense

of the hotel room and the atmosphere outside. The figures outside the hotel room were lit in red light which created a feeling of dangerous and luring sexuality (see Figure C). Inside the hotel room, there was an absence of furniture in the space that focused everything on the bed. This created a foreshadowing effect that kept the audience hanging on every moment as the couple danced around the subject of going to bed together. The overall effect of the scene was a looming atmosphere that created a sense of danger surrounding the sexuality of the scene.



Fig. C

Color was absent in Episode 4: Maternal. This dynamic shift in color created a sense of sterility in the hospital scene. The set was very simple with just the hospital bed and a few medical framings (see Figures D and E). The white light emphasized the harshness of the scene. A dynamic shift was also taken with the placement of the set. The scene was staged far upstage on a high platform that created an eerie distance between the audience and the play. This shift caught the audience's attention by catching them off guard. This change altered the mood of the play by showing yet another impact of the machine's effect on this society.



Fig. D



Fig. E

Episode 5: Prohibited involved a new choice in coloring that helped transform the atmosphere from the previous scene. The majority of the scene was downstage involving the audience much more than the previous episode. The colors were much more saturated in both the lighting and the costume choices (see Figure F). The brilliant blues and deep hues of red and purple gave the atmosphere a warmer, sultrier feel. This scene captured a change in the character of Young Woman with the introduction of First Man. The closeness of the scene to the audience and the new coloring involved the audience in that change as the play gave a glimpse into a part of the world where the machine did not yet have full control.



Fig. F

Episode 6: Intimate was the most natural looking episode. The colors were mostly gray and white in the set and costuming but the alluring blue-purple light that was cast in the background gave a sense of refreshment to the scene (see Figure G). There was an immediate sense of lightness and romance that was in stark contrast to the previous episodes. This helped move the audience along in the story as they saw a dynamically different side of Young Woman as she first experiences freedom. The contrast created during this scene helped the audience reflect on how the machine had influenced and controlled things in the previous and following scenes.





Fig. G

Episode 7: Domestic jolted the audience back into the cold and distanced world of the play. The empty space left on either side of the couch created the implication of two polar opposites which emphasized the differences between Young Woman and George H. Jones (see Figure H). The staging was very effective in showing the dynamic change in Young Woman as she continued to feel the weight of the world around her. The isolation of the scene to a confined space repeated the impression created in Episode 2, thus returning the audience to the detached, mechanical world of the play.



Fig. H

The scene created in Episode 8: The Law filled every corner of the stage. The staging of the trial scene into a v-shaped formation created a looming sense of danger as everyone surrounded Young Woman (see Figure I and J). The most unique quality to this scene was the way Young Woman was moved around the stage on her chair by the different positions of authority in the case. The movement was directly linked with who was manipulating her at the time. The overall feeling of the scene was an intense threatening sense of entrapment that Young Woman was desperate to escape.



Fig. I



Fig. J

The design of Episode 9: A Machine combined all of the previous mechanical elements to show a final overpowering machine. The feeling of isolation was created by having both the priest and barber sections far stage right. It was isolated from the rest of the world. This was especially highlighted by the lighting during the priest scene (see Figure K). The looming, ominous sensation was especially highlighted during the barber scene where Young Woman was overtaken by the people manipulating her (see Figure L). Finally, the unique aspect of jolting distance was used in the electrocution scene. The electric chair was positioned at the very back of the stage and high on the platform (see Figure M). This alarming amount of distance between the audience and the action of the play forces them to reflect upon what is happening onstage while still remaining engaged. The final picture is a strong one that resonates in an audience's mind as they leave the theatre (see Figure N).



Fig. K

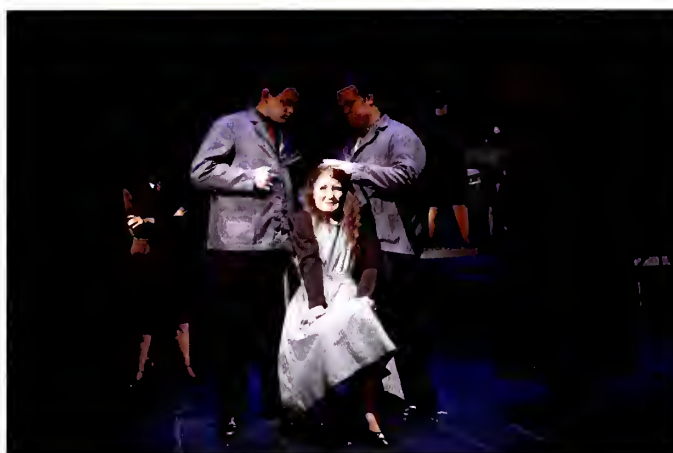


Fig. L

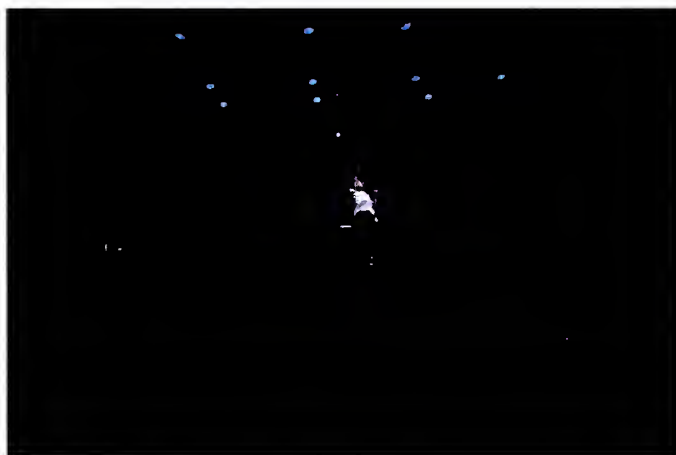


Fig. M



Fig. N

The overall effect of the design took the audience on an arduous journey as they shifted from episode to episode. The audience remained captivated by the shifting of focus during each new scene. This allowed them to think critically about how the mechanical society was affecting Young Woman. The scenic and lighting designs did an exceptional job at incorporating the mechanical nature of the society into their designs. This idea was further completed through the sound and costume designs as well as the unique use of physical transitions between scenes.

The sound design, by Krystal Kennel, utilized familiar mechanical sounds mixed with music to create a unique atmosphere. The atmosphere was filled with the motion of a city life with the unconscious motorized nature of that society. This was especially effective through the pre-show music and the opening episode. Before the text of the play was spoken, the audience was enveloped by a cacophonous collection of sounds that immediately put them into the world of the play. The sound design carried this mechanical element through the production and assisted in connecting the audience to the idea of the machine. The sound was something the audience could hold onto through the journey of the play. The sound changed and adapted to the shifting moods in the play while remaining true to the mechanical nature of the script. When the sound did shift, it was particularly effective. For example, before the execution scene, a silence fell across the stage. The newfound silence emphasized the coldness and severity of the scene so that when the cacophonous sound of the electrocution happened, it was very powerful. This and other moments were particularly effective because of the consistency of the design. The through-line of the sound design helped to take the audience on a journey while keeping them connected to the idea of the play.

The costume design, by Melissa Shumate, was especially important in making an immediate distinction between Young Woman and the other characters in the mechanical world. In the first episode, it was established that Young Woman did not fit in. Her clothes were very different in color and structure from the other characters. While the other workers were in neutrals, Young Woman wore a pale yellow floral print dress with a lavender cardigan (see Figure O). The other characters' clothing was very structured and confining while Young



Woman's dress flowed. This established her distinction from the crowd—she did not fit. This theme was carried out throughout the production, thus highlighting her delineation from the society around her.



Fig. O

One very unique aspect that director, Becky Becker, brought to the production was in the transitions. Instead of simply cutting from one episode to the next, she incorporated the other actors as part of the machine and had them change the set from location to location. This further assisted in creating the image of the machine. It especially helped in illustrating how the characters become a part of the machine. The transition between Episode 3 and 4 was particularly effective. The idea created was a shift between romantic and robotic nature. Becky Becker along with the assistant director, Katie Truett, choreographed the actors to perform a waltz that began very sweeping and romantic and ended with the women being dragged mechanically offstage. That transition showed that the men completely controlled the women even in the romantic aspects of their lives. One of the most unique transitions was between Episode 4 and 5. In a very mechanical but dance-like manner, the different characters passed on the items for the staging of the bar. They passed on tables and chairs in a way that was spellbinding. Watching the transition was almost like being in a trance as the scene changed before the audience's eyes. Transitions like these kept the idea of the mechanical nature of the play even during the softer episodes.

These elements combined created a multi-faceted experience for the audience. Spectators were drawn into the world of the play with a clear understanding of the influence of the mechanized society on the characters within it. The difference between Young Woman and the society around her was highlighted through every aspect of the design and production elements. Without these specific components, the audience's perception of the world of the play would not have been as evident and therefore the play would not have had such an important impact.

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